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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000520

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SUBJECT: IN DIWANIYAH PROVINCE, POLITICAL
COALITION-BUILDING HAMPERED BY DA'WA INFIGHTING

REF: BAGHDAD 314

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Michael Klecheski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a PRT Diwaniyah reporting cable.

¶11. (C) Summary: Although Da'wa, which won 11 of Diwaniyah's 28 Provincial Council (PC) seats, is in a strong political position, infighting within that party has left the governorship and PC chairmanship up for grabs. Under the circumstances, coalition-building is proving a difficult, albeit peaceful process, with current indications that the Sadrist will join Da'wa as the core of a leadership coalition. End summary.

Da'wa Infighting

¶12. (C) On the Diwaniyah political scene, the week since the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) announced how many seats each party would get as a result of the provincial election has been dominated by infighting within Da'wa. Ahead of that announcement, talk about the next governor had centered on the party's leader in the province, Salim Hussein Alwan (reftel), and he continues to be viewed as a front-runner. Recently, however, leading sheikhs have been telling us that Fadel Mawat, chief of the Tribal Support Council, is also a serious contender. The two reportedly went to Baghdad shortly after the IHEC announcement in what proved an unsuccessful attempt to reach agreement.

¶13. (C) In a February 27 meeting, Hussein Ali al Sha'lan, a Council of Representatives member with Iraqiyah ties and arguably the province's most influential sheikh, told us that huge differences remain within Da'wa and the State of Law coalition. Neither of the two top contenders willing to back off and other Da'wa party figures also hoping to get the governorship. Meeting with us in between sessions in the provincial capital to find common ground, Sha'lan said no resolution is in sight for the moment. A local journalist told us that, under the circumstances, an independent might become governor.

Da'wa-Sadrist Alliance Likely

¶14. (C) According to Sheikh Sha'lan, Da'wa is likely to forge an alliance with the Sadrist to create a majority in the PC. For his part, Sha'lan expressed concern about allowing the Sadrists a position of power in Diwaniyah, although he hoped that if that proved the case, they would feel obliged to act responsibly. Whether or not ISCI was also included in the alliance, it was likely to get at least some leadership slot in order to buy it off, he commented.

¶15. (C) Sha'lan was one of several of our contacts who said that, despite the current problems, the next administration would be more constructive than the current one. The transition would cause some challenges, he noted, and the new

governor would likely remove at least some of the incumbent Directors General, but eventually, things would stabilize under a less religiously focused, more competent set of officials. Several local journalists shared that view, expressing hope that they would have more leeway to do their work without harassment than at present. Assuming the new governor came from Da'wa, one journalist speculated that he would seek to be maximally effective in order to further strengthen that party's image ahead of the upcoming series of elections.

Complaints from Losing Entities

¶6. (C) Immediately following the election, we had heard relatively few charges of fraud. Such charges subsequently increased, however. Several sheikhs favorable to Allawi's party, for instance, told us they had proof that their party had been cheated out of second place in the province. (They Qhad been cheated out of second place in the province. (They did not identify the nature of that proof.)

¶7. (C) The complaints culminated in a peaceful demonstration on February 21 by representatives of a number of parties (the exact number is in dispute), which began at a Diwaniyah city mosque and proceeded to Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) headquarters. Estimates of participation ranged from 150 to 1,000 people. When we contacted Diwaniyah's GEO head that day, he dismissed it as insignificant while relaying to us reports that political forces in Baghdad had engineered it for their own purposes. The demonstration has so far had no further resonance.

BAGHDAD 00000520 002 OF 002

¶8. (C) Comment: After years of ISCI rule, Da'wa is clearly looking forward to political dominance in Diwaniyah. The current infighting is somewhat debilitating for the moment, and has proven a bit of an embarrassment to the party in the province. Who becomes the new governor and PC chair remains entirely unclear, and Da'wa will need to form what could prove a fairly complicated coalition. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful that the province's next governing team will prove appreciably easier to deal with than the current one and we are laying the groundwork for expanded cooperation with it.
End comment.

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